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SUBJECT: MILITIAS IN BASRAH BEGIN TO INFILTRATE IRAQI ARMY

REF: (A) BASRAH 030 (B) BASRAH 055 (C) BASRAH 058

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REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: On August 2, the Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC) met with Majed al-Sari, the intelligence chief and representative of the Ministry of Defense (MOD) in Basrah. He confirmed that a new battalion of the Iraqi Army (IA) in the south of the city is being composed entirely of Fadhilla Party members. Majed also pointed to pressure from militia and political groups on the IA and MOD employees in Basrah and complained of the lack of support from the Coalition Forces for independent and liberal individuals who want to resist the influence of the militias. End Summary.

¶2. (S) The Regional Embassy Office (REO) had initially heard of possible militia infiltration of a new IA battalion from Colonel Thafir, the Chief of the Intelligence unit for Customs and Border Enforcement. He spoke with the REO political assistant and warned that a new battalion being formed in Basrah was being composed entirely of members from the Fadhilla Party. The new battalion was to act as a quick reaction force and be based in the southern neighborhoods of Al Zubair and Al Barjeseyah. According to Colonel Thafir, the Governor of Basrah, Mohammed Al Waeli, in conjunction with the head of one of the regiments of the Iraqi Army 10th Division, were orchestrating the formation of this new battalion.

¶3. (S) When asked about the new battalion, Majed al-Sari confirmed that the Iraqi Army in Basrah was being pressured and infiltrated by militias. He stated that even the Commander of the IA 10th Division, Major General (MG) Abdul Latif, had come under pressure to put militia members in various IA positions. Majed recounted an incident where members of Badr Corps approached MG Latif and insisted that certain IA officers be chosen to head IA intelligence units. MG Latif refused and found himself the focus of a smear campaign by Badr Corps who accused him of being an ex-Baathist. Majed added that MOD employees in Basrah have also come under pressure from different militias to provide intelligence data and information. He complained that several individuals in his office have succumbed to this pressure.

¶4. (S) In past meetings Majed al-Sari has openly voiced his dislike of the Governor (see refs A and C), however, this time he was much more careful. When asked whether the Governor was behind the recruitment of Fadhilla members for this new battalion, Majed remarked that the head of the regiment was from Fadhilla and was the main driving force behind this recruitment. Majed commented that in May he had been warned by the MOD not to continue to accuse the Governor of criminal activities or he

would lose his job. According to the MOD, Majed's constant accusations were making the security situation in Basrah worse and difficult to manage. Majed stated that if he lost his job, he would have to leave Iraq and join his family in Sweden otherwise he would be killed. As a result, in this meeting Majed chose his words about the Governor carefully, stating that MOD has to work with the Governor, not against him. He was also careful to point out that there were other parties besides Fadhilla that were infiltrating the IA.

¶ 15. (S) The DRC asked about the possibility of Majed's office reviewing the applications for the new battalion and selecting only those individuals who were not affiliated with any militia.

Majed responded by stressing the mistrust felt by independents and liberals towards the Coalition Forces. He stated that many people would like to take a stand against the militias and resist their pressure, but they lack the support of the Coalition Forces to do so. Majed said if he tried to stop the recruitment of Fadhilla members into this new battalion, he would be called an ex-Baathist and possibly become the target of assassination squads. He could not rely on the Coalition Forces to step in and help him.

¶ 16. (S) Comment: As a result of his experience as intelligence chief and MOD representative, Majed al-Sari is extremely knowledgeable about militias in Basrah (see ref B). His confirmation that militias are now seeping into the IA is troubling. Long regarded as the last great hope for managing the security situation in Basrah, the IA now appears to be succumbing to the same disease that already has infected the Iraqi Police Service. End Comment.

MARRANO